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9. UNUSUAL ORNITHOLOGICAL RECORDS FOR PAKISTAN

**Chlidonias leucoptera** (Temminck) White-winged Black Tern

HANDBOOK (Volume 3) indicates that there is an eastern population which occasionally wanders down to the east coast of India being recorded in Assam, Sylhet and Ceylon. There are only three definite records for the western seaboard from Bombay and Saurashtra.

On May 1st 1977, I visited Haleji Reservoir, an artificial lake some forty-five miles north of Karachi. The approximately three square mile lake is surrounded by an artificial embankment on the outside of which are many reed and tamarisk-fringed seepage pools. It is a rich wintering ground for Anatidae (twelve species can be seen in a day), besides having breeding colonies of Purple and Night Herons and Little Egrets. It has been declared a sanctuary since 1970. On one of these seepage pools there was a group of Whiskered Terns, *Chlidonias hybrida* hunting in repeated upwind sorties in typical fashion. I was at once attracted by a very brightly contrasted Black and White Tern amongst this group and to my delight found three Whitewinged Black Terns in full breeding plumage hunting over the same stretch of water. They were slightly larger than the Whiskered Terns and their all black underwing coverts besides jet black back and scapulars made them easily separable and distinctive from the Whiskered Terns. My impression in the bright sunlight was that

their bills were black without any red. Their calls were more high pitched and less grating than those of the Whiskered Terns.

In 1970 on March 21st, a visiting French ornithologist, Jacques Vieillard now on the staff of the Paris Museum, visited Manchar Lake in Sind and thought he saw some White-winged Black Terns amongst Whiskered Terns. Though he was familiar with this species from North African ornithological surveys, while staying at my home in the Punjab subsequently, I rather arrogantly convinced him that he must have been mistaken especially as the birds were still only partly moulted into breeding dress. I must now record my apologies for what was almost certainly Monsieur Vieillard's record of the first recorded occurrence of this species in Pakistan.

**Corvus corono sharpii** Oates—Eastern Hooded Crow

An adult male specimen was noticed on the first day of 1976, frequenting some buffalo stables which I daily pass on the way to work, some twelve miles on the western outskirts of Karachi city in an arid desert area with scattered *Prosopis juliflora* scrub. The bird was generally in the company of House Crows (*Corvus splendens*) and attracted my attention by its paler grey breast and mantle, and then its noticeably larger size.

A specimen of the northern race, within

a few miles of the Arabian Sea coast, was obviously a most unusual straggler so on January 3rd I reluctantly decided to shoot it. The skin and its endo-parasites have been preserved and will be deposited in an appropriate Museum when opportunity allows. Measurements are: Total length 460 mm; wing 315 mm; tail 175 mm; tarsus 69 mm; culmen 50 mm. These measurements indicate a slightly smaller than average bird according to the range given in Stuart Baker (1922); (Wing 32-34 cm; tail about 20 cm; culmen 47 to 54 cm; tarsus about 55 cm and total length 48 cm).

My colleague Mrs. Ismat Parveen Anwar kindly examined the specimen for endoparasites and found about 50 adult males and 60 female Nematodes in its alimentary tract, identified as *Diplotrriaena tricuspis* (Fedtsch 1874), which has already been recorded in the Asiatic population of *Corvus cornix* (synonym for *Corvus corone cornix*). Its blood stream also contained the larval micro-filaria of *Diplotrriaena*. There were also ten female specimens of *Dispharynx spiralis*, syn: *D. nasuta* (Molin. 1858).

A review of available literature indicates that the Hooded Crow occurs in two racial forms in neighbouring countries as well as inter-breeding with the Carrion Crow (*Corvus corone orientalis*). A very pale grey form (*Corvus corone capellanus*) breeds in southern Iraq and winters eastwards as far as the extreme south-west of Iran (Hüe & Etchecopar 1970). *Corvus corone sharpii*, which breeds throughout northern and central Iran, is considered only as a winter visitor to the north western regions of Afghanistan (Paludan 1959). Stuart Baker in the FAUNA OF BRITISH INDIA: (Birds, volume 1: 1922), cites Magrath and Whitehead, Army officers who were keen ornithologists and served before the

first World War in these regions, for the evidence that the Carrion Crow (*Corvus corone orientalis*) was a regular winter visitor to Bannu and Kohat districts, but I do not know on what basis he claimed that *Corvus cornix sharpii* (syn: *Corvus corone sharpii*) occurs in winter in the north west Punjab. It is noteworthy that in Ripley's SYNOPSIS (1961) only the Carrion Crow, *Corvus corone orientalis*, is listed as occurring in the sub-continent, so there must have been some doubt as to the Hooded Crow observations. Salim Ali & Ripley in the HANDBOOK (Vol. 5, 1972), state that *Corvus corone sharpii* is a regular winter visitor to the North West Frontier Province, mentioning Peshawar, Mardan, Hazara, Bannu and Kohat.

Since there have been no reliable ornithological records or observations from these regions for the past 50 years, (neither Hugh Whistler nor H. Waite served outside of the Punjab), it is to be hoped that new studies can one day be made to find out the exact status of these crows. My own direct observations, supplemented by correspondence with bird watchers who have worked temporarily in these regions during the past ten or fifteen years, have corroborated that the Carrion Crow does still occur in winter around Bannu and Kohat being comparatively uncommon around Kohat. In the upper Kurram Valley (Para Chinar) it probably still breeds, as I saw one individual carrying a stick in its bill in mid-April. It is also reported to breed in the Takht-i-Suleiman Mountains on the border between Zhob and southern Waziristan. I have no reliable records of Mardan or Peshawar but the Jungle Crow (*Corvus macrorhynchos*) does straggle in winter down into the plains of Hazara as well as Mardan districts adjacent to the foothills and may account for sightings of Carrion Crows, recorded by Stuart

Baker (1922). In the field, silent birds of these two species cannot be separated though this would be possible by examination in the hand. Because of its similarity in coloration to the House Crow, the Hooded Crow could be overlooked, but so far I have failed to obtain any records even of possible sightings. Even an experienced ornithologist like Major Magrath believed that the Carrion Crow came into the Murree hills after the monsoon, which supposition is now known to have been mistaken (Whistler 1930).

**Motacilla indica** Gmelin—The Forest Wagtail

There are not many remnants of the original riverain forest left along the banks of the Indus river but an unspoiled block of about 5 square miles survives south of Sujawal bridge along the Indus river in the Thatta district of Southern Sind. (24° 10' N., 67° 56' E.). It comprises mainly *Acacia arabica* with a scattering of *Prosopis spicigera* and *Tamarix dioica*, on the higher land and the ground beneath is fairly bare of vegetation even in winter, being subject to annual inundation during the monsoon by upto 5 or 6 feet depth of silt-laden water. The avifauna of such forest is restricted, but tends to be rather unique and different from the surrounding cultivated areas or arid hilly tracts, and in December 12, 1976 I took two visiting ornithologist friends to visit this forest being certain of being able to show them Honey Buzzards (*Pernis ptilorhyncus*) and Red-breasted Flycatchers (*Muscicapa parva*) which would not be so readily encountered elsewhere in southern Sind.

The forest floor abounded with White Wagtails (*Motacilla alba*) and the occasional Sind Jungle Sparrow (*Passer pyrrhonotus*), but it was my friend Peter Conder (formerly Presi-

dent of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and a well known author) who drew our attention to a rather unusual pipit-like bird, which upon examination was found to be a Forest Wagtail. The third member, Bruce Amstutz, of the US Embassy, was also familiar with this bird from previous service in Burma. Apart from the clearly discernible double necklace of black and the two broad white wing bars, it was also distinctive in its habit of wagging its tail or rather lower body sideways instead of up and down in the manner of the surrounding White Wagtails. It was quite tame and allowed us to follow and watch it for some time. By chance I was able to visit the same forest with my family in December 27, and was amazed to encounter presumably the same Forest Wagtail within a hundred yards of the December 12 sighting.

This wagtail which breeds in south eastern Russia and China, is migratory in winter but normally visits only the southern part of India and Ceylon, and I have twice seen it in evergreen forest in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, where it was very tame. There is one record for Kutch (Ali & Ripley's HANDBOOK volume 9) where it was described as a straggler and I recollect that there is one very old skin in the Bombay Natural History Society collection labelled Karachi Sewage Farm which is attributed to this species.<sup>1</sup> Because this wagtail is not rare within its normal range in China and south eastern Russia, I decided to try and collect it the following week but a laborious search in the same region only revealed maddening numbers of White Wagtails. It is just possible that odd birds regularly turn up in these riverain forests and I shall certainly be on the lookout for it next winter.

[<sup>1</sup> There is an error here. We do not have specimens of any of the *Motacilla* from Karachi.—Eds]

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#### 10. NOTES ON THE STRIATED BABBLER *TURDOIDES EARLEI* (BLYTH) NEAR DELHI

During 1973 and 1974 intermittent observations were made on a population of Striated Babblers *Turdoides earlei* in an area of reed-swamp (*Typha*) close to the Yamuna canal, south of Delhi. The area was visited on eleven occasions during February to May 1973 and twice in February and March 1974. The species was quite common in the vicinity of reed beds and also foraged frequently in nearby water meadows and arable land. Several groups were seen in January, in an adjacent area, feeding on dry fields and along bunds, but the species was not recorded in this habitat during the breeding season.

Four groups of Striated Babblers were located in 1973 within an area estimated as 0.24 km<sup>2</sup> in extent. Three groups were counted accurately and included eight, nine and ten birds; the fourth was estimated as containing five birds. The total population was therefore estimated as 32 birds and the density 133 birds

per km.<sup>2</sup> The groups were not counted accurately in 1974, but four groups were agani present in the same area.

Nine nests were found in 1973 and two in 1974. Nest sites were of two types; either 1-2 m above the ground in a small palm tree (3 nests), tucked in at the base of the leaves, or 20-50 cm up in a dense clump of reeds (8 nests). The observed laying dates for first eggs were 27 February, 5 March and 9 April and two complete clutches were both of two eggs. Only two of the nests located in 1973 succeeded in fledging young and both of these were situated in reeds.

Because none of the birds were marked, it was not possible to tell how many group members participated in feeding the nestlings, but at both nests observed more than two birds took part. At one nest, containing young 5-7 days old, at least six adults were seen 'queuing' to deliver food to the nestlings, out